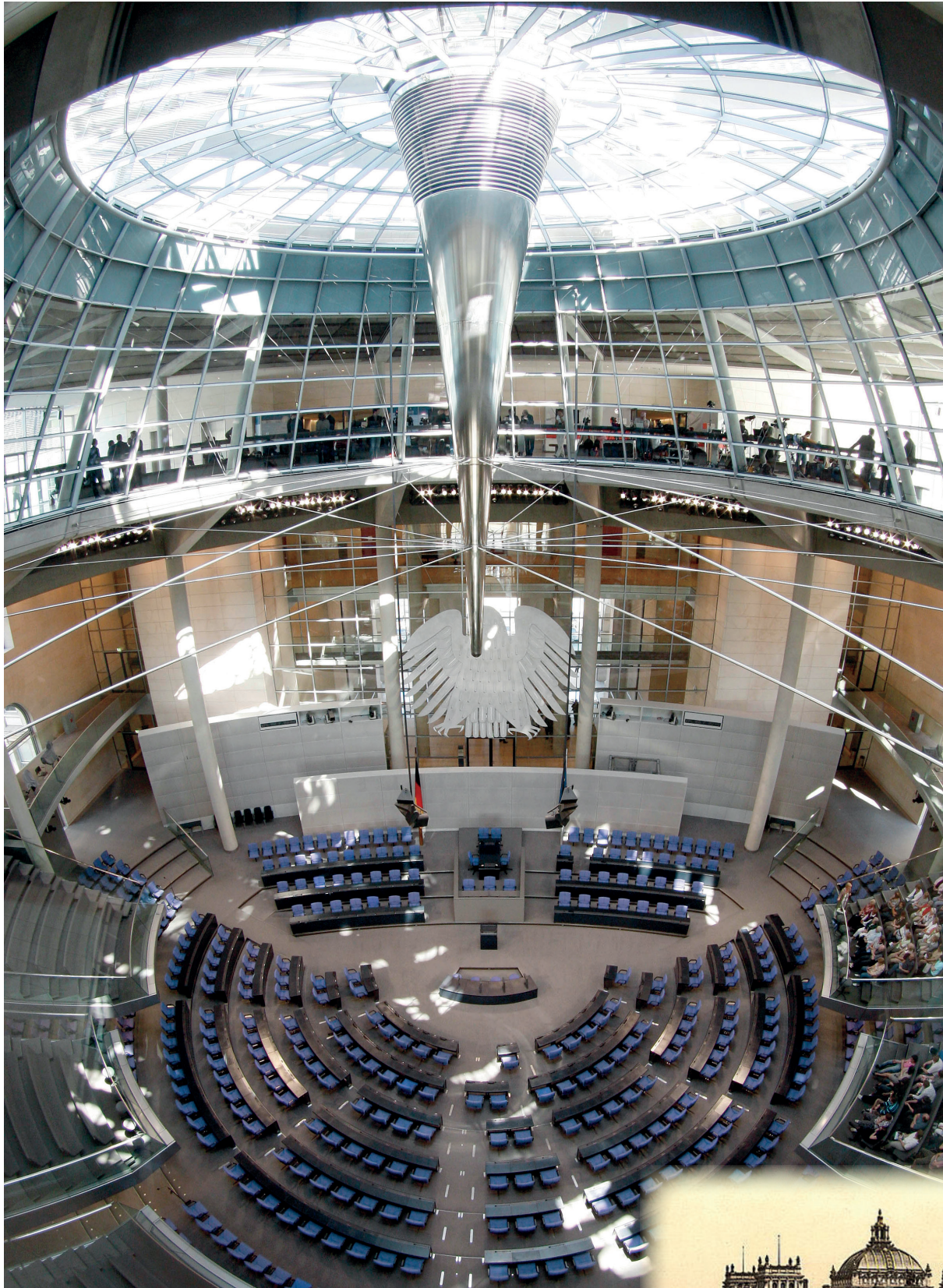


# THE BERLIN WALL

A photograph of the Berlin Wall, showing its weathered concrete surface with several bullet holes. A historical photograph is superimposed on the wall, depicting the moment of its fall. In the inset, a man in a brown jacket is using a sledgehammer to strike the wall, while others look on. The wall is topped with a dark, jagged concrete edge. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

20 YEARS LATER





The new home of Germany's *Reichstag*, or parliament, completed in 1999. Its glass dome represents the openness and transparency of democratic politics. Inset: the predecessor Reichstag building. It was damaged by fire shortly after the Nazis came to power in 1933. The Hitler regime nullified many civil liberties in the aftermath of the fire.





# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
Michael Jay Friedman	
<b>Paths To 1989</b> .....	5
Fritz Stern	
<b>A Contested Future</b> .....	13
Robert J. Lieber	
<b>“I Will Remember That Day All My Life”</b> .....	21
Adam Michnik	
<b>“Those Were The Days, My Friend”</b> .....	27
Anna Husarska	
<b>“Berlin Divided... And Reunited, 1961–1989 (A Chronology)</b> .....	32
<b>Roundtable:</b>	
<i>“What Was The Significance Of November 9, 1989?”</i> .....	44
Theresa Bond .....	46
Janusz Bugajski .....	48
Edwina S. Campbell .....	50
Roy Ginsburg .....	52
Ronald H. Linden .....	54
Andreas Rude .....	56
Simon Serfaty .....	58
Manfred Stinnes .....	60
Jeremi Suri .....	63



# INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL JAY FRIEDMAN

**T**he Berlin Wall — symbol of a divided city within a divided nation within a divided continent — was grounded in decades-old historical divisions. Most proximately, Nazi Germany could only be subdued by the combined power of many nations, led by the democratic capitalist Anglo-Americans and the communist Soviets. Their joint liberation of Axis-occupied Europe naturally raised the question: whose system would prevail, and where?

The victors' inability to agree on an answer also reflected real historical divisions. The Soviet Union conceived of itself as the vanguard of a global proletarian uprising, "waiting," in Lenin's words, "for the other detachments of the world socialist revolution to come to our relief." Western governments in turn understood communist movements in their nations to be subservient to Moscow, and that far from "waiting," Soviet leaders worked steadily and stealthily to hasten revolution. And the British and Americans remembered, (along with Poles, Finns, Latvians, and many others) that the Second World War began with a bargain among dictators — Hitler and Stalin partitioning Poland between Germany and Soviet Russia. Only with the launch of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, and Hitler's declaration of war on the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, did the democracies and the leading communist power join forces.

The Second World War did not end with a definitive peace treaty. Instead, and this simplifies

greatly, the powers whose armed forces liberated a nation from the Nazis ultimately shaped that nation's subsequent political character and geopolitical alignment. Western Europe thus emerged free, democratic, and generally aligned with the United States. Eastern European nations were ruled by communist regimes acceptable to Moscow, their foreign and military policies also subject to Soviet diktat.

Germany was a special case, Berlin even more so. The British, Soviets, and Americans each would defeat the Wehrmacht in part of Germany. At the Yalta Conference of February 4-11, 1945, the "Big Three" agreed that Germany would be divided into four temporary occupation zones, France being the fourth occupying power. Berlin, Germany's capital and leading city, lie 110 miles inside the Soviet occupation zone. At the Potsdam Conference (July 17–August 2, 1945) the Allies agreed to a similar four-power division of Berlin.

Even then, it was understood that control of German manpower and industrial resources would tip substantially the postwar balance of power. Germany had invaded Russia twice in forty years; the Soviets were determined that postwar Germany be either Communist dominated or else permanently weak, neutral, and disarmed. The western allies soon concluded that unless Germany and the other nations of Europe were both democratic and prosperous, Soviet power might expand throughout the rest of the continent. Over \$13 billion in Marshall Plan aid from the U.S. helped to secure this prosperity. The Soviet Union



and the east European nations under its sway rejected Marshall aid. Meanwhile, in the Soviet occupation zone, the Red Army began dismantling and transporting to Russia German factories and other industrial structure, as reparations for the tremendous damage the Wehrmacht had inflicted on the Soviet Union.

Later, in 1962, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev likened West Berlin to “the testicles of the West. Every time I want to make the West scream, I squeeze on Berlin.” His predecessors might not have phrased it quite the same way, but they also viewed West Berlin, a dangerously exposed western enclave within the emerging Soviet bloc, as a place they could exert pressure. In June 1948, as the western Allies and the Soviets failed to agree on whether Germany should be rehabilitated economically, the Red Army blockaded West Berlin. In response, the British- and American-led Berlin Airlift ferried by air some 13,000 tons of food daily, until Stalin lifted the blockade in May 1949. A few days later, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was proclaimed in the western occupation zones. The German Democratic Republic (East Germany) was founded in the Soviet occupation zone that October.

For the next twelve years, Berliners possessed an opportunity afforded few Cold War Europeans: the chance to vote with their feet. Between September 1949 and August 1961, some 2.7 million East Germans, the young and educated overrepresented among them, crossed into West Berlin and thence by plane to the Federal Republic. In an ideological contest spanning claims of which system best could meet its citizens’ material needs and other aspirations, this mass emigration (the GDR actually lost population during this period) represented a powerful indictment of the communist system, as did the suppression of the 1953 East German workers’ rebellion, the 1956 Hungarian uprising, the 1968 Czech revolution, and Polish protests in 1956, 1970, and 1981.

In August 1961, the GDR began to construct the Berlin Wall. At first it was barbed wire, but soon it expanded into a 5 meter high 165 kilometer long network of concrete walls topped with barbed wire, and guarded with gun emplacements, watchtowers, and mines. Willy

Brandt, then the mayor of West Berlin, feared the wall would turn his city into “a concentration camp.” He warned U.S. President John F. Kennedy that West Berliners’ morale might collapse. Kennedy was sympathetic, but insisted that “a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war.” But Kennedy also flew to West Berlin, delivering there in June 1963 a moving address, and insisting to at least a quarter million Berliners (one-fifth of the city’s population) gathered that day “*Ich bin ein Berliner*.”

At one level, the Berlin Wall afforded Europe stability. The periodic international crises over the city eased. As the French man of letters Francois Mauriac quipped, “I love Germany so much I’m glad there are two of them.”

But the communist bloc was not as stable as it appeared. East Berliners continued to seek freedom in the west. As the historian David Reynolds observes: “the fugitives kept on coming — jumping from windows, cutting the wire, tunneling beneath the wall, even ballooning above it.” Nearly 200 died trying to cross. And within the Soviet bloc, communism was failing. East European nations fell further behind their western peers and knew it. New technologies proved more compatible with the western models of personal autonomy and economic entrepreneurialism. By 1989, the contradictions within the Soviet bloc, as an earlier generation of communists might have put it, had been heightened — higher even than the Berlin Wall itself.

This book recounts how and why that wall crumbled. Among the voices gathered here are those of leading scholars, a dissident from a time when dissent required real bravery, and a journalist who was there when the walls came down all through Eastern Europe. We offer this book proudly, in hopes that those who today enjoy freedom will treasure it always, and that those who do not — yet — may take inspiration from events now only twenty years in the past.

---

Michael Jay Friedman is Print Publications Division Chief at the Bureau of International Information Programs. He holds a PhD in political and diplomatic history.







# PATHS TO 1989

FRITZ STERN

**T**he breaching of the Berlin Wall on November 9 was the most dramatic symbol of freedom regained in that miraculous year 1989, when in the political life of Central Europe the unimaginable became almost routine. Millions of people in East-Central Europe staged peaceful protests against the existing regimes, and communism seemed to be withering away. Much of the world rejoiced, but for Americans the end of that monstrous division in Berlin had a special significance. For half a century, the United States, consonant with its policy of containment, had in one way or another protected the freedom of West Berliners, as indeed that of West Germans; gradually and reciprocally, former foes had become cherished friends.

Opposite Page:  
West Germans  
attempt to tear  
down a portion  
of the Berlin Wall  
on November 11,  
1989, while East  
German guards  
try to disperse  
them with hoses.

We must take a quick look at where that wall had come from. In their common victory in 1945, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain had divided Germany into three (later, with France, four) zones of occupation, with Berlin as the seat of an Allied Control Council that was to be responsible for major policies in all zones. The Soviet

zone of occupation surrounded the former capital of Germany, and thus Berlin, itself divided into four sectors, became an island in a red sea. Allied unity, already endangered by Soviet moves in Eastern Europe in 1944-1945, gradually ended in a Cold War, an outcome neither side desired, yet with each contributing to its development. By 1948 — after the communist seizure of power in what had held out as a democratic Czechoslovakia — the Western Allies gave up hope that they could







Above: East Germans riot in Berlin in 1953, as the authorities try to hose them down and Soviet troops arrive. Martial law was declared and many were killed. Right: West Berliners unload food that was flown in by Americans during the Berlin Air Lift in 1953.

successfully cooperate with the USSR in Germany and made what, in retrospect, should be considered prudent preparations for the creation of a West German democratic polity. When in June 1948 the Allies also supported the introduction (even to West Berlin) of a new German currency, the *deutsche mark*, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin responded with a total blockade of West Berlin, designed presumably to stop Western plans for a West German state or, at the very least, to impose Soviet rule on the entire city. The United States and Britain, eschewing a military confrontation, resolved on an audacious alternative: to supply West Berlin's roughly 2 million people by air. The Berlin Airlift was a brilliant demonstration of Anglo-American power, peacefully employed for democratic ends. In this costly process, Americans could count on the fortitude of West Berliners, led by their social democratic leader, Mayor Ernst Reuter, the first postwar German politician to impress the American public. In May 1950, the Soviets agreed to end the blockade for a token reward. This was a triumph for the Western Allies at a time of weakness



in their military deployment: By 1948, most American forces in Europe had been brought home, while the vast Red Army remained stationed all over Central Europe.

Berlin remained symbol and supreme danger spot during the Cold War; it was used as an escape hatch by East Germans who wanted to trade life in their ever more economically depressed dictatorship for a life of freedom and mobility in West Germany, which was then enjoying an "economic miracle" with a socially responsible market economy. (The Western Allies' help promoted West German recovery, while the Soviet demand for reparations from East Germany further enfeebled that already depressed state-controlled economy.) President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963), for one, understood that this singular open exit,





Above: A GDR policeman patrols the Berlin Wall as workers make it higher.

Right: Soviet tanks arrive to violently quell the crowds during the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1968.



from communist East Berlin to West Berlin, represented a genuine danger to the East German regime, and he also understood, as he said at the time of the Bay of Pigs disaster (a failed, U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba by exiles from the Castro regime) and the fear of Soviet retaliation, that if there were to be a Third World War it would begin in Berlin. Stalin's successor, the volatile Nikita Khrushchev, also realized that East Germany's demographic losses were intolerable for the East German regime, which was constantly badgering the USSR to take tough measures to close the opening.

In 1960-1961, the flow of East German refugees grew alarmingly, and it was clear that the drain had to be staunched. On August 13, 1961, the East Germans, finally with Soviet blessing, erected the elaborate, ugly wall that cut the city in half, leaving West Berliners free but hemmed in and often separated from friends and family, and East Berliners permanently unfree behind what in typical double speak was officially called the "Antifascist" wall. The immediate American response was relatively mild, disappointing

Willy Brandt, the young mayor of West Berlin, and West Berliners generally. The two Berlins now became rival showplaces for the two rival systems. And West Berlin prospered, continuously helped by American public and private aid and protected by a token Allied military presence. In time, East Berlin emerged from Stalinist drabness, but as to its material well-being — to say nothing of the repression it endured in the Stasi-dominated society — it was a poor if evolving entity.

The Berlin Wall continued to remind Western leaders and many West Germans of the unnatural division of Germany, but they tacitly accepted it and concentrated on the construction of a European Community. The Western powers were content to negotiate for measures to alleviate the many deprivations that the Wall imposed. Détente with the Soviet Union had become the West's hope, and this policy took different forms. In 1975, the United States, its European allies, and the USSR and its allies concluded the Helsinki Accords. The first two accords confirmed the inviolability of existing borders, thus giving legitimacy



to the de facto boundary changes made in postwar Central Europe, while the third part, commonly called the “third basket,” provided that all signatories would respect the basic human and civic rights of their citizens. With the consequent establishment of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), the Soviet Union gained important reassurances. As to the “third basket,” while at first few political leaders on either side realized its inflammatory potential, it is imperative to recall — especially to understand 1989 — that it offered dissident movements in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union moral encouragement and shreds of legal protection.

Soviet tanks had repeatedly crushed violent protests against the regimes in its satellites — in East Germany in 1953, in both Poland and Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968. But after Helsinki, groups of quiet, heroic, and nonviolent dissidents — as already manifest with Václav Havel’s Charter ’77 in Czechoslovakia — became a much greater force within the Soviet dictatorships. Here were the beginnings of civil societies formed from below, imbued perhaps by the sense of what Havel later called “the power of the powerless.” Admirable and important as these groups were, they alone could not have altered the repressive conditions, however. For that, one needed changes at the top, and that came with the astounding and perhaps historically unprecedented simultaneous appearance of spiritual and political leaders who understood the deadening effects of life lived in stagnation — unfree, uncreative, and impoverished.

Even communists themselves recoiled from the rigid hand of Moscow: In 1975, leaders of Italy’s and Spain’s large communist parties concentrated their criticism of Moscow in something they called “Euro-communism.” In this new mode, the West European communists, who had previously been subservient Marxist-

Leninists even during the dominance of its ugliest form, i.e., of Stalinism, broke with some of the party’s basic principles — promising to cooperate with democratic political parties, for example, thus surrendering the previously enshrined dictum that the Communist Party would always represent the sole supreme authority in any communist country. Euro-communists had already openly criticized the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Perhaps, as many conservatives thought, Euro-communism was a sham, a mere ruse. At the very least, it was a straw in the wind.

Poland, the largest Soviet satellite, had its own history of unique suffering, first under German occupation and then under its Soviet “liberation.” Its earlier history of being partitioned by neighboring European powers had bred its own defiant form of nationalist resistance. Postwar economic misery had sparked open protest against its Polish communist rulers and their despised masters in Russia, the uprisings of 1956 being the most open manifestations of this resistance, as well as strikes and demonstrations in 1970. And still, as in the entire Soviet bloc, repression, backed by Soviet tanks, worked.

Then a dramatic change occurred: In 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Cracow was selected as pope. A Polish pope! Unprecedented in the history of the Catholic Church — and yet another sign perhaps that history had reached a sudden stage of openness. Pope John Paul II, bare of any military power, almost instantly mobilized new hopes among his countrymen. “Have courage,” he admonished the many millions who, in his first papal visit to Poland in 1979, saw and prayed with him. He became the ultimate moral authority in his country: a charismatic figure, intensely human and yet fortified by the aura and pomp of the Church. (I visited Poland for the first time in 1979, a month after this trip. His effect was palpable.)



Karol Józef Wojtyła — Pope John Paul II — greets a huge crowd in his hometown of Wadowice, Poland, in June, 1979.



He wanted to liberate Eastern Europe from the soul-deadening rule of atheistic communism; that he had strong misgivings about Western liberal society became clearer at a later time.

All Soviet satellite states, indeed the USSR itself, were suffering from economic privation and backwardness, and economic discontent was often the igniting cause of protest on the part of peoples groping toward the construction of a civil society. Strikes occurred, but none as portentous as the strike in the Lenin shipyards in Gdansk that began on August 14, 1980. The strike leader, trade-unionist Lech Walesa, summoned from Warsaw, among others who supported the strike, two intellectuals, Bronislaw Geremek and Tadeusz Mazowiecki. From the Inter-Factory Strike Committee that guided the strike to its conclusion in September, there emerged what amounted to a national political movement, Solidarity (*Solidarnosc*), challenging the now insecure regime. From then on, Solidarnosc enveloped the country — the first free union in a communist country, governed for the first time in Polish history

not by reckless, romantic passion but by political prudence and the absolute rejection of violence. Solidarnosc, workers and intellectuals cooperating, exemplified old social democratic hopes, and for some years those hopes briefly and anonymously held sway. Solidarnosc was civil society in nuce, claiming millions of members and posing a threat to the very existence of the Soviet system. On December 13, 1981, the Polish head of state, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, imposed martial law and imprisoned the Solidarnosc leaders, hoping to expunge the danger. But continued economic misery and the unbroken will of multitudes finally forced the party into concessions, negotiated at a round table beginning in February 1989; the very shape of the table became a symbol of the peaceful negotiations by which, beginning in Poland, communist parties yielded power. Poland's first semi-free elections resulted in Mazowiecki's becoming the first non-communist prime minister in what had been a communist country. (No doubt, the Polish pope was invisibly present in these historic changes.)



And yet the decisive presence had yet to emerge. In 1958 — after years of senescent Soviet leaders — Mikhail Gorbachev, younger than the other communist leaders and radically different from them, was elected secretary general of the Communist Party. Having grown up in the Soviet system and risen through it, he had intimate knowledge of its crippling defects. He came to power with radically new thoughts, understanding the Soviet Union's desperate need for reforms in the economic realm (*perestroika*) and the civic realm (*glasnost*). He envisioned a reformed communist Russia taking its place in what he called the “Common House of Europe.” That this broke with communist dogma about the inevitable conflict between socialist and capitalist systems was clear. Gorbachev understood the power of the United States; he knew that President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) had denounced the “evil empire” and started his ill-fated Strategic Defense Initiative; and he had heard Reagan’s defiant “tear down this wall” demand. It is a tribute to both men that, fearful of a nuclear holocaust, they reached important agreements concerning disarmament in 1986 and 1987. Also in 1986, Gorbachev brought the great astrophysicist and civil-rights champion Andrei Sakharov back to Moscow from his internal exile in Gorky, a

gesture that was an electrifying recognition of his commitment to human rights. And two years later, he withdrew Soviet troops from Afghanistan, reducing the military element in Soviet policy. From the very beginning tacitly and ultimately explicitly, he abandoned the Brezhnev doctrine, which had prescribed Soviet intervention in satellite countries in which the position of the Communist Party was threatened. What opened the road to 1989 was Gorbachev’s hope that the satellites would find their own way to a reformed communism, free of either promise or threat of Soviet tanks. In the end, Gorbachev failed as a reformer in his own country, but he made possible the liberation of the satellite nations.

The unrest in the Soviet bloc that had become manifest in Solidarnosc made its appearance elsewhere as well, even in the German Democratic Republic, whose orthodox leadership continued to be fearfully suspicious of any liberalizing tendency (to the point of censoring Gorbachev’s speeches). Peace vigils beginning in the fall of 1989 in East German churches were quickly extended to peaceful protest marches in a number of big cities. On October 9, some 70,000 citizens in Leipzig marched peacefully under placards proclaiming “We are the people” and demanding democratic

Below left:  
Mikhail Gorbachev (left) applauds after he and Ronald Reagan (right) signed the landmark intermediate-range missile (INF) treaty of 1987.

Below right:  
One thousand East German pro-democracy supporters build a human chain through East Berlin in October, 1989.





reforms — and they did so knowing that the regime had mobilized troops and given additional blood supplies to local hospitals, and knowing, as protesters everywhere knew, that communist regimes still had the means to liquidate protest; this had been evident in the massacre of Tiananmen Square in Beijing only a few months earlier.

But the people's wish for freedom was contagious and no longer to be repressed. In June, the Hungarian-Austrian border was virtually opened, and this meant that East Germans, who could easily travel to "fraternal" communist Hungary, now could reach West Germany, via Austria, without surmounting the Wall in Berlin. Other East Germans fled to the West German embassies in Prague and Budapest, determined to remain on embassy grounds until the means to get to West Germany were provided. At obvious risk, East Germans were on the march, either abroad or, even more impressively, on the streets at home. On November 9, the opening of the Berlin Wall signified the triumph of the first peaceful and ultimately successful German revolution, a triumph perhaps not sufficiently honored by their West German brethren.

By the end of 1989, the satellites of the Soviet Union had been freed. What very few

had thought possible — that Soviet rule could actually be overthrown peacefully — had occurred. Historians will long debate what all contributed to this liberation and how, but that it was a concatenation of unforeseeable processes seems clear: I find it tempting to think of it as a silent conspiracy of decency. The events in Berlin were symbol and reality of the triumph of Western and, therefore also, American ideals.

I have only hinted at the subterranean connections, which remain to be explored. Two hundred years after the great French Revolution, a very different revolution tried to create a new Europe, and for once, by the benevolent cunning of history, the right leaders and brave, prudent citizens appeared simultaneously. Perhaps never before or after was there so much hope in the air, and perhaps it was too good to last. For many reasons, such as the return of violent nationalism, reality in some places very quickly turned ugly and bloody again. But a precedent was set, a successful precedent that affirmed the "power of the powerless." I doubt that the sparks of those days are extinguished forever: Might one see that under radically different conditions and for radically different purposes, millions of Iranians on the streets of Tehran, demanding a different, better life, are following that precedent?

Near a rebuilt section of the Berlin Wall and a museum at the former Checkpoint Charlie, a man walks through a field of wooden crosses that commemorate those who were killed at the wall.




---

Fritz Stern, University Professor Emeritus at Columbia University, is an historian of modern Europe, particularly Germany. Recipient of international honors and prizes, he has published widely in the U.S. and abroad; his most recent work is *Five Germanys I Have Known* (2006). He served as senior adviser to the U.S. Embassy in Bonn, 1993-1994, while Richard Holbrooke was U.S. Ambassador there.







# A CONTESTED FUTURE

ROBERT J. LIEBER

**M**omentous events take on a life of their own. The American Revolution in 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Russian Revolutions of 1917, and the end of World War II in 1945 all continue to stand as watersheds, marking the boundaries of old and new eras, and as the subjects of continuing debate as to their political, cultural, and historical significance. The opening of the Berlin Wall rightfully merits inclusion in this list, and two decades later the event still reverberates in terms of its meaning and consequences. The joyous throng of East Berliners pouring into West Berlin on the night of November 9, 1989, represents not only an indelible memory for people of that city, but it symbolizes a more profound transformation: the peaceful reunification of Germany; a Europe whole and free; the end of a worldwide Cold War that had threatened to plunge the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies into a catastrophic conflict; and — arguably most important of all — compelling evidence for

the proposition that given the opportunity to choose, people will demand political freedom.

Almost anyone who lived through the Cold War, and not just in Germany, will still remember key moments: the Berlin Airlift of 1948-1949, the Korean War (1950-1953), Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech denouncing the crimes of Stalin, the Soviets' launching of Sputnik — the first space satellite — in 1957, erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, the Vietnam War, the Soviet-led invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), and the transformation of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev beginning in 1985.

Right: Berliners watch in anticipation as American planes fly in supplies during the Berlin Air Lift, which lasted from June 1948 - May 1949. Opposite Page: East Berliners atop the Berlin Wall, near the Brandenburg Gate, December 22, 1989.







Above: American and Soviet tanks face off during an especially tense Cold War confrontation. Right: Decades later, Berliners walk freely below a sign demarking a border that no longer exists.

As a young graduate student, I vividly recall a trip on foot through Checkpoint Charlie on a cold, dreary late December day just a few years after the Wall had been built. The barriers, warning signs (*"Achtung, Sie verlassen den Amerikanischen Sektor"*), and taciturn and wary East German border guards and *volkspolizei* created an atmosphere worthy of a John LeCarre novel. (Indeed, LeCarre's *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* captures the temper of those times.) I recall, too, meeting East German students while visiting the eastern half of the city, including an ambitious, talented young physics student who believed in the ideals of his system but yearned for socialism with a human face. Less than two years later, he and



his friends would be arrested and imprisoned after they sought to protest East German troops' participation in crushing the Prague Spring, and I would not see him or his family again until more than two decades later after the Wall had miraculously opened.

The Wall came down for reasons large and small, though none of these diminish the surprise, even shock that this could happen so suddenly and peacefully. At one level, people had voted with their feet. Ever since the creation of the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the eastern sector of Germany occupied by the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War, large numbers of people seized the opportunity to move from





Clockwise from top: Women and children refugees arrive in West Berlin; (Left to right at front) Soviet Communist Party Chief Nikita Khrushchev, Premier Nikolai Bulganin, and Deputy Premier Anastase I. Mikoyan welcome delegates to the 20th Communist Party Congress in Moscow; West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (second from left) joins the other NATO representatives in 1956.



The Prague Spring, 1968. Czech protestors surround a Soviet tank. Their protest would be violently suppressed but disillusionment with Communism would deepen.



East to West (as another friend of mine and his family did by riding the S-Bahn in a not-yet divided Berlin). After August 1961, those who fled did so under dangerous and sometimes deadly conditions. They left homes and friends in search of a better life, the material attractions of the West, and personal freedom on the other side of the Wall. In the final months, as Czechoslovakia and Hungary liberalized, East Germans fled by the tens of thousands through those neighboring countries, in a flood the GDR authorities were incapable of stopping without bloodshed and that the 400,000 troops of the Red Army stationed in East Germany would not stop, not in 1989, and not to save a tottering regime.

In reality, the opening of the Wall represented just one of four historic transformations compressed into a remarkably short time: the end of a divided Germany and a divided Europe; the end of the Cold War, a

conflict that had begun in Europe; the collapse of Soviet communism and almost all of its imitators; and the dissolution of the USSR into its 15 constituent republics. These extraordinary transformations stimulated enormous enthusiasm and optimism.

An "End of History"?

The post-Berlin Wall events marked the start of dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, as well as Latin America and Africa. Transitions to democracy and away from state-controlled economies took place in the former Warsaw Pact countries, most notably Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, but also throughout the region. The Russian Federation and many of its 14 former republics also adopted democratic forms of governance and economic transformation, though many with disappointing results. Elsewhere in the world, a flood tide of political opening and economic reform seemed to portend



a bright future. This optimism is captured in a widely cited essay and book, *The End of History*, by the political theorist Francis Fukuyama. He argued that in view of these epic changes, it had become evident that liberal democracy and a market-oriented economic order were the only viable options for modern societies.

Unfortunately, the predominance of these political and economic models proved more contingent than seemed to be the case in the initial heady days and months of the post-Berlin Wall era. For some, the creation and stabilization of these new systems became far more problematic than expected. Many of the countries of Eastern Europe as well as the Baltic states successfully implemented wrenching political and economic transitions, though the process itself was at times long and arduous. But in the Balkans, as well as parts of the Caucasus, Central Asia, and also Africa, the process was fraught with difficulty. Ethnic conflicts erupted, driven by appeals to extreme nationalism, and elections sometimes brought the veneer of democracy without the substance.

In Russia itself, the initial forms of democracy under Presidents Gorbachev (1985-1991) and Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) were burdened by a chaotic transition and economic collapse. From 1999 onward, the country's institutions became more stabilized but increasingly took on a semi-authoritarian form in which, despite the appearance of democracy, President Vladimir Putin (1999-2008; prime minister, 2008-present) and his colleagues presided over what *The Economist* magazine termed one of the most "criminalized, corrupt, and bureaucratized countries in the world." Currently, the Russian people possess much more autonomy in their daily lives than they had under Soviet communism, but they do so within a system that stifles independent political parties and the rule of law, lacks an independent judiciary, gives its cronies control of leading companies, and dominates television and the major media.

Even where liberal democracy and the market economy have taken root, initial enthusiasms and boundless optimism have

Czechoslovakia's 1989 "Velvet Revolution" liberated that nation from Soviet domination. Here, 200,000 crowd the streets of Prague. The white banner reads "Free Elections."





waned. In some places, for example Bulgaria and Romania, the problems have been those of corruption and of inadequate state capacity to carry out successfully the functions for which it is responsible. The ardent desire of Eastern European countries to gain entry to NATO and the European Union helped significantly in the early post-Cold War years to keep democratic and economic transitions on track. Requirements for rule of law, civilian control of the military, minority rights, political freedoms, and accountability proved to be real assets during these transition periods and when applicant states found themselves buffeted by competing priorities and claimants at home and abroad.

Here it is important to understand the differences between liberal and illiberal democracy. Liberal democracy requires not just elections and some of the formal institutions of democracy (parliament, president, courts), but a free press, rule of law, independent judiciary, minority rights, freedoms of speech and assembly, the ability of parties and individuals to seek office peacefully through competitive elections, and the functioning of civil society institutions in which people's livelihoods and way of life do not depend exclusively on the government. Illiberal democracy (a term coined by the prominent journalist, editor, and scholar Fareed Zakaria) denotes a system in which elections take place, but in which civil liberties, civil rights, and the multiple dimensions of a genuinely democratic society are severely limited or altogether absent. Societies emerging from dictatorship and affected by deep ethnic and sectarian divisions have been especially vulnerable to these internal conflicts.

Even where corruption and government performance have not been major factors, lingering doubts can remain. A recent opinion poll in the former East Germany revealed that a shocking 57 percent of respondents

defended the former GDR, with even those acknowledging its bad sides now claiming that "life was good there." Certainly there is misplaced nostalgia, driven by the predictable frustrations of daily life, especially at a time of recession and high unemployment. Attitudes and history matter too. Explaining this kind of apology for dictatorship requires an empathetic understanding of attitudes and historical experience. The population of East Germany had been unaccustomed to the challenges, the risks, and the opportunities of life in a free society. They had lived for 56 years under dictatorships: from 1933 to 1945 under the Nazis and then until 1989 under a Soviet-imposed communist regime. Adapting to life in a liberal democracy and market economy may thus require generational change as well.

We like to think that all good things go together: liberty, popular sovereignty, equal opportunity, equality of condition. But as Professor Michael Mandelbaum has noted in *Democracy's Good Name*, the idea of democracy itself has historically combined two related but sometimes competing notions: liberty, i.e., freedom of the individual, and popular sovereignty. These notions can and do come into conflict, for example if majorities favor policies that restrict individual freedom or even repress or limit the rights of some members of society. Stable liberal democracies resolve this contradiction through constitutionally mandated rights protected from majoritarian restriction and through maintaining an independent judiciary to which individuals can appeal.

More broadly, the combination of liberal democracy and a market economy also embodies a certain inbuilt tension. A market economy helps to preserve individual liberty, but it also can give rise to substantial economic disparities. This inequality, in turn, can conflict with notions of popular equality and social solidarity.



Bosnians celebrate in the streets of Sarajevo in 1995, days before the Dayton Peace Accords officially ended the war in Bosnia.



Challenges come from external sources as well. As the political scientist Azar Gat has described in a provocative and widely cited Foreign Affairs essay, the rise of authoritarian capitalist powers poses a renewed threat to the predominance of liberal democracy. They represent an alternate path to modernity, and just as the defeat of their 20th-century precursors, Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan, depended on the United States' coming to the aid of the European democracies, so too the future requires active and sustained American engagement on behalf of liberal democracies and societies.

In this competition, differences of outlook among the democracies remain an ongoing problem. They often disagree among themselves on important policy choices, such as democracy promotion, international economic policies,

and how best to respond to threats from proliferation, failed states, ethnic conflict, and human rights abuses. Despite calls for a League of Democracies to offset the weaknesses of the United Nations, the European Union, and other international institutions in confronting common world problems, the criteria for where to draw the line between liberal and illiberal democracies remain problematic, and few countries are willing to prioritize such a new grouping above their existing commitments to regional bodies, other institutions, or more narrowly defined national interests.

In short, two decades after the opening of the Berlin Wall, rather than the end of history and a foreordained triumph of liberal democracy and the market economy, the future remains contested. Despite this, there are reasons for optimism. To some extent, the





Above: After a fraudulent 2003 election, Georgians launched the Rose Revolution. Right: Hungarian women cast ballots in 2009. Below: A rural Romanian family expresses its political allegiance.



information revolution and the development of modern knowledge-based societies appear to create a propensity, i.e., a receptive environment, for liberalization and democracy. Looking to

the past but also the future, not only the fall of the Wall itself, but the collapse of Soviet communism, the end of the Cold War, the success of velvet revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, the halting but nonetheless real progress of democratization in many parts of the world, and massive demonstrations for freedom by the Iranian people suggest there is something deep seated, profound, and fundamental in the desire for political freedom. Its success is not inevitable, but as presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have proclaimed, the aspiration for liberty and democracy is an intrinsic human longing.

The challenge for the world's democracies today is foreshadowed in a remark by one of America's Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, after the historic Constitutional Convention of 1787. When asked by a passerby if the new United States would be a republic or a monarchy, he replied, "A republic if you can keep it." Much the same might be said about the global future for free societies and market economies. Their prevalence may not be foreordained, but with effort and commitment, the likelihood of sustaining and extending them remains promising.

---

Robert J. Lieber is Professor of Government and International Affairs at Georgetown University and the author or editor of fifteen books on international relations and U.S. foreign policy. He publishes and lectures widely and has appeared on U.S. and foreign television and radio networks.



# "I WILL REMEMBER THAT DAY ALL MY LIFE"

BY ADAM MICHNIK

In 1989 nobody anticipated the fall of the communist regime — no one in the world. When U.S. President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) called in West Berlin, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" people took it as an echo of Cold War rhetoric and not as a realistic political project.

And yet, the Wall was torn down.

I will remember that day for the rest of my life. It was during an official visit of the leaders of the Federal Republic of [West] Germany to Poland, which was already governed by the cabinet of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist prime minister in the Soviet bloc. It was in the afternoon. I had been invited for a talk with the West German Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher. We were discussing the prospects for the next few months. During our conversation an aide entered the room and handed the minister a piece of paper. Genscher read it, looked at me, and said: "The border crossing in the Berlin Wall has been opened." That was the conclusion of our interesting conversation. I ran to the office of *Gazeta Wyborcza* [the democratic newspaper founded by Michnik and other journalists and political

activists — Ed.] and penned a few sentences of commentary to be published on the first page. I wrote it was a great holiday: In the perennial struggle between man and barbed wire, today man triumphed and the barbed wire was defeated.

I was under the impression that all of Poland was rooting for the Germans, who were walking towards freedom. We kept repeating: "*Ich bin Berliner... Ich bin Berliner.*"

In all appearance, East Germany (the German Democratic Republic, or GDR) was a communist state, and yet it was somehow unique. It had a typically incompetent government run by a party nomenclature, corruption, ubiquitous police surveillance, and a deepening economic crisis. What was atypical, however, was the existence of the other — democratic and rich — German state and the presence of Soviet garrisons on the GDR's territory. It used to be said about Prussia that it was not a country that had an army, but an army that had a country. The GDR was not a country with Soviet garrisons; it was a country for Soviet garrisons. That was the reason for and the guarantee of the GDR's very being.







In 1989 the Soviet garrisons, which in 1953 had saved the GDR regime by suppressing a workers uprising, received new instructions. The new rulers in the Kremlin had launched the policy of perestroika, in fact a retreat in internal and foreign policy from the logic of the Cold War. GDR leader Erich Honecker refused to accept this new policy. His cronies used to say: "Should we have to change the wallpaper in our home only because our neighbor changes his?"

But East Germans also did not like the old wallpaper. When on June 20, 1989, Hungarian foreign Minister Gyula Horn, together with his Austrian counterpart, cut the barbed wire on the border between their two countries, East Germans began pouring through Hungary into Austria. A little later, those who did not want to emigrate started to demonstrate in the streets of East Germany — the new policies of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev emboldened people, and Lutheran churches in the GDR served as meeting places for the protesters. West German President Richard von Weizsäcker accurately defined the two sources of the demise of Honecker's regime: Gorbachev and churches.

During Gorbachev's visit to Berlin in October 1989, people shouted "Gorby!" and

chanted, "We are the nation!" Later, the slogan changed into "We are one nation!"

The Berlin Wall thus fell in the German people's minds even before the actual event, which followed soon thereafter. On October 22, 1989, Erich Honecker was deposed and on November 9 Gunter Schabowski, the chief of propaganda and member of the Politburo of the SED, the East German ruling communist party, said in a press conference: "Today we reached a decision to issue an ordinance that allows every citizen of the GDR to leave the country through any border crossing." After a moment, he added that the ordinance is effective "immediately."

If Schabowski misspoke, it was the most important and most beautiful slip of the tongue in the history of Germany. Right after the announcement, Berliners armed with mallets and chisels set about to dismantle the Wall. What was unimaginable became real. The German circle was squared.

The fall of the Berlin Wall contributed greatly to the downfall of the communist system in the whole bloc, but it was not the first decisive event. The process — as seen from Warsaw — had started in a big way in August 1980, when a large strike in the Gdansk shipyard delegitimized the dictatorship of the communist party, which claimed to be the "dictatorship of the proletariat." It was an exceptional event — the proletariat issued a stern warning to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was the utmost moral defeat of communism. The real dismantling of the Berlin Wall began right there, right then. The Polish Round Table compromise and the subsequent semi-free elections in June 1989 were themselves heavy hammer blows against the Wall.

Other events contributed. The policy of U.S. President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981), who put human rights on his banner and sought "détente with a human face," started a confrontation the Soviet Union could not

Below: The last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, shakes hands in Bonn in June, 1989.  
Opposite Page: East Berliners atop the Berlin Wall, near the Brandenburg Gate, December 22, 1989.





Right: Lech Walesa speaks to striking workers at the Gdansk Shipyard in 1980. The milestone Gdansk Agreement led to the first independent labor union in the Eastern Bloc, Solidarity. Below: Adam Michnik (center) casts his vote during the first partially-free elections within the Soviet bloc. Solidarity won a sweeping victory over the Polish Communists.



win. Neither could it prevail against the policy of President Reagan, who challenged the “evil empire,” engaging the Soviets in an arms race they could not win. The pontificate of John Paul II also played an immense role, with the pontiff setting the Christian message of human freedom and dignity against a communist doctrine based on violence and lies. The whole

sequence of event — as well as the Soviet failure to keep up technologically with the United States and the misadventure in Afghanistan — led to Gorbachev’s new policy, one in which Soviet troops no longer would prop up the communist GDR regime. Probably no one did so much for the world as the last general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party,



although abolishing communism was certainly not part of his plan.

The fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of post-Yalta Europe; it marked the end of faith in the communist utopia and in the perpetuity of the Soviet regime; it marked the end of the punishment imposed on the Germans for unleashing Nazism and starting the war; it also marked the end of humiliation for democratic Europe, which tolerated the image of a great city tortured day after day with barbed wire and border towers.

But the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism had more than one facet. Just as the massacre in the Square of Heavenly Peace in Beijing counterpoised the Polish elections of June 1989, which brought the defeat of the communists, the velvet revolutions in Central Europe had their darker parallel in the bloody events in Romania and the long war in the former Yugoslavia. The velvet was stained with blood. The smell of this blood still lingers in Europe. I felt it in many places — for example, in the refugee houses set aflame in several German cities. Those houses burned after the fall of the Wall. A whole library was written about the paradoxes of German unification and I can add little to the subject. But I remember an anecdote I once heard from one of my German friends. Shortly after the unification, an Ossie and a Weissie meet in Berlin. The Ossie says, “Welcome! We are one nation.” The Weissie replies laughing, “We too!”

Although I am a Pole free of Germanophobia, this laughter still rings in my ears, especially when I observe how numerous German politicians and intellectuals abandon critical reflection on German history and choose preoccupation with harm done to Germans, usually accompanied by a morally relativistic view of the harm done by Germans to Poles. The ease with which some see a symmetry between the expulsion of Poles and Jews from

their homes and their cities after the aggression on Poland in 1939 and the expulsion of Germans decreed by the Allies after Germany lost the war both worries and saddens. The embarrassing opportunism and conformism of some German elites that accompanies this mental shift saddens, too.

I notice similar phenomena in other European countries, including my own. But nowhere are they as dangerous as in Germany.

To put it differently, although Europe changed a lot — and for the better — after the destruction of the Berlin Wall, it did not become an Arcadia of flourishing tolerance, respect for the dignity of others, and unfettered love of one’s neighbor. Our continent is still full of minefields, booby traps, and threats with which we must reckon.

And yet — after those 20 years — I remain an optimist. Why? Because I have no other option.

---

Adam Michnik is the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the largest Polish daily. In 1968-1989 he was one of the leading organizers of the democratic opposition in Poland. Historian, essayist and political publicist, he was the editor of several underground “samizdat” periodicals and was arrested and imprisoned several times for his pro-democratic activities. In 1980 - 1989, he was an adviser to the independent trade union Solidarity and its leader, Lech Walesa. In 1989 he participated in the Round Table Talks that brought about the end of the communist system in Poland. Michnik is the author of several books, including *Letters from Freedom*, *The Church and the Left*, and *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*.







# "THOSE WERE THE DAYS, MY FRIEND..."

BY ANNA HUSARSKA

**Y**our point of view depends on your viewpoint" goes an old Polish saying, and the way we, in Eastern Europe, saw the coming down of the Berlin Wall is a perfect illustration of this proverb. Here is my view — one shaped by a sympathetic understanding of the Polish historical experience.

First: What was the Berlin Wall?

Among other things, it was a metaphor. The difference between what one saw from either side of the physical structure tells us much about a Europe divided into Soviet and non-Soviet zones, a fate sealed at the Yalta Conference in 1945.

From the West you could come up to the wall, you could touch it, scrawl graffiti on it, watch "the East" from an elevated platform. The Berlin Wall was a stage for American presidents: John F. Kennedy proclaiming his solidarity with the encircled city, "*Ich bin ein Berliner*"; Ronald Reagan pounding at the Soviet leader, "Mister Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

From the East, the Wall was gray and depressing. We knew (but could not see) that

behind the concrete structure topped with barbed and razor wire was the seven-meter-wide post way of raked gravel and — so we were told — a minefield.

And while the Wall was an enclosure around West Berlin (the French, British, and American sectors), metaphorically it encircled and enslaved half the continent.

For us in Eastern Europe, perhaps the most oppressive and difficult indignity was the wall of denials:

The wall of communist laws forbidding free travel to the democratic part of the world

Right: The "Big Three" (front row, left to right) of Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin shaped postwar Europe at the Feb. 1945 Yalta Conference. Opposite Page: The Berlin Wall blocks access to the city's famed Brandenburg Gate.





Right: East Germans queue up at a state-run store.

Far right: Lech Walesa, leader of Poland's Solidarity union, casts his ballot in a 1989 election as his son Bogdan looks on. Walesa later would serve as President of Poland.



collectively (still today!) called “the West” — lest we see through the regime’s lies.

The wall of communist censorship making it nearly impossible to read anything other than propaganda — lest we be infected by bourgeois, capitalist ideology. (Uncensored books, magazines, and newspapers had to be smuggled in, but we devoured them when we could.)

The wall of communist “jamming” of foreign radio stations, such as BBC, Radio Free Europe, and Voice of America, with a persistent buzzing noise — lest we hear the truth about events in the world and in our own country.

But even worse was the wall inside each of us, the one that made us live a schizophrenic existence in two worlds — homes and company of family or friends where one could be oneself and a second world, false but increasingly familiar, in which we would wear a mask of obedience. The apprenticeship into this double life started early, around kindergarten, where we learned political slogans while reading Winnie the Pooh and made hammer-and-sickle paper cuts while playing with teddy bears.

Second, the date — or dates — the Wall fell also contributes to our understanding.

November 9, 1989, is the date most potently associated with the end of the unjust oppression of half of Europe. But the Wall began to crack back in 1980 when the Polish trade union Solidarity was created at the Lenin

shipyard in Gdansk and it won the right to strike. Also one might conclude that only with the 2004 admission of eight East European countries into the European Union was the Europe created at Yalta truly undone, although not just yet if one lives in Belarus.

Even within the annus mirabilis 1989, many East European events competed for attention and significance: the first talks between a communist regime and its political opposition (April, in Poland); the first semi-free elections (June 4, in Poland, eclipsed by the tanks crushing the dreams in Tiananmen Square that same day), the historical rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and his companions from the 1956 Budapest uprising (June 16, in Hungary); the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, itself grounded in the Charter 77 movement 12 years earlier, began in earnest that November. A month later, the former dissident writer Václav Havel was president. Finally, Romania — until then seemingly the most solid communist regime — proved the bloodiest in its sudden fall, also in 1989.

Meanwhile, that year’s German history can be framed within characteristically orderly brackets: a January 19 pronouncement by East German leader Erich Honecker that “The Wall will be standing in 50 and even in 100 years, if the reasons for it are not yet removed,” and an improvised speech by West German head



Clockwise from top left: November 1989, happy East Germans on their way to new homes in the West. The displayed license plate has been defaced to indicate "Germany" rather than the GDR; at a Dresden rally in December, 1989, East Germans display a banner calling for "One Germany"; with the Wall down, East German pass through "Checkpoint Charlie" into West Berlin.



Helmut Kohl to the citizens of the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) gathered in Dresden on December 19 as the crowd shouted, "Germany, Germany" and "We are one people."

Third, the actual, physical crumbling.

The Wall was not merely 106 kilometers of concrete elements and 68 kilometers of metal lattice fence with 302 watchtowers bisecting a German city. It was instead the

most conspicuous part of the physical and metaphorical Iron Curtain dividing free and unfree Europe.

When exactly did this Curtain come down? Cracks appeared when Hungarian officers removed the barbed wire on their border with Austria. This was in May 1989. That summer thousands of East Germans drove their tell-tale Trabants (a notoriously unreliable, locally manufactured East German car made, some





Bucharest,  
December, 1989:  
Civil Defense  
members  
deliver food to  
revolutionaries.

alleged, of cardboard) to Warsaw and Prague and from there to Budapest, hoping to make it to "the West." And so when on September 11, 1989, the Hungarians opened their border for citizens of the GDR to exit freely, some 15,000 Germans voted with their feet. That was one dent in the dam-like Berlin Wall, and a big one. Three weeks later, citing "humanitarian reasons," the GDR authorities allowed a special train to leave Warsaw with almost a thousand East German refugees, transit the GDR, and continue on to the Federal Republic of Germany. More such trains left soon from Poland, carrying a total of 7,600 refugees. By

November 3, 40,000 East German refugees had left for West Germany via Czechoslovakia. Now the dam really was leaking. The Wall looked far less sturdy.

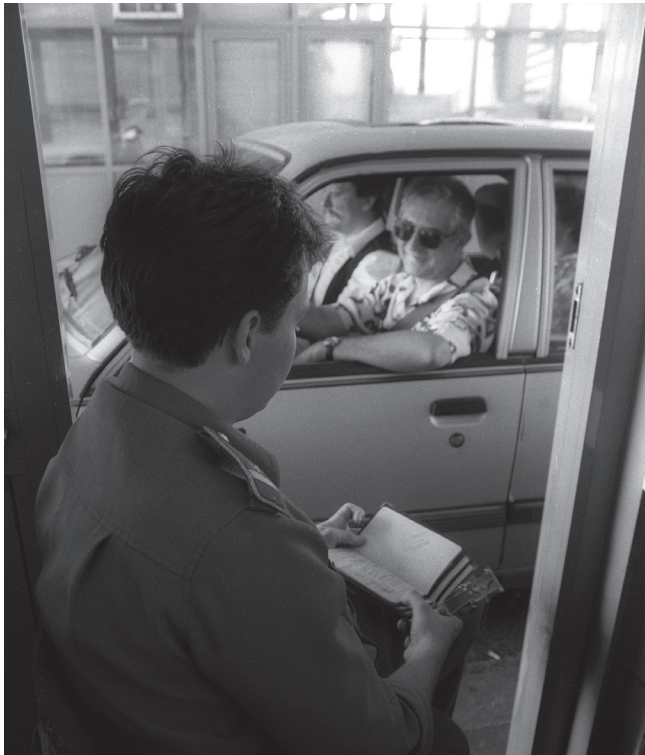
Given the precise procedural formalism and stiffness of the GDR, the ultimate irony of November 9, 1989, was how the Wall at last opened that day: It was a bureaucratic screw-up. Not having been properly briefed, Communist Party leader Günter Schabowski famously announced in a live, televised press conference that all rules for traveling abroad were lifted. When pressed by journalists, he stated that it was "immediately," not for the next day as it was planned. As for the rest, well, we all saw it.

No, I was not in Berlin the night the Wall fell. On November 9, 1989, I was in the editorial offices of *The New York Times*. The editor, Max Frankel, had granted me a short-term internship. I would acquire some experience about independent newspapers and apply it in the newly democratized Eastern Europe, where I had a journalist job waiting for me. That such a position was even possible in Poland tells us much about the rush of events.

A few days before the Wall came down a Polish actress declared on the TV news, referring to our semi-free elections: "Ladies and gentlemen, on June 4, 1989, communism ended in Poland." It did. And the *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Electoral Gazette) daily newspaper, created as part the decision to hold those elections, was, as the saying went, "the first free newspaper between Berlin and Vladivostok."

I came back to Poland in the spring of 1989, after 15 years of living abroad, to join the editorial staff of that daily. I found the newly secured freedoms almost unbelievable, but my colleagues not only knew it was for real, they also expected a domino effect soon would bring the crumbling of the entire Soviet bloc. Surely, they argued, the Poles could take the credit for that? The patriot in me agreed.





A Hungarian border police officer checks travel documents at the Hungarian-Austrian border in 1996. What was once the first open border between Soviet Bloc countries and the West is now among the many open borders in a united Europe.

The reporter in me wanted to see it all. In 1989, the *Gazeta Wyborcza* foreign desk was as privileged a seat as they come to observe the demise of communism.

For the rest of 1989 and well into 1990, I reported for *Gazeta* as the domino pieces fell: from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Nicaragua, then — writing for a newly created weekly — from Albania and from the Baltic States. Having participated in the Solidarity movement, I had very high expectations for the other movements across Eastern Europe.

Reporting from Czechoslovakia was probably the most exciting. It was the cleanest, smoothest, and most elegant of the “revolutions.” It was also a swift one. Graffiti in Prague that winter featured this simple list:

Poland, 10 years.

Hungary, 10 months.

East Germany, 10 weeks.

Czechoslovakia, 10 days.

It took a little bit longer than 10 days, but

still it was a time when everything seemed possible, when we Eastern Europeans thought, as the song went, “We’d live the life we choose, we’d fight and never lose.”

Moving almost directly from reporting on the “velvet revolution” in Czechoslovakia to Romania’s “bloody revolution,” took me from the seventh cloud of heaven to hell on earth.

In my notebooks from that time I find these entries:

Dec 12, 1989, Prague:

People on Václavské náměstí square dance and sing “For Christmas we want Havel president” and they stick flowers in the barrels of the rifles of the puzzled policemen.

Dec 25, 1989, Bucharest:

Palace Square smells of wet ashes from the burnt out building of Communist Party and people repeat “Today is Christmas, the madman is gone” as they watch the replay of the execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Dec 28, 1989, Bucharest:

State Romanian television broadcasts a film with Charlie Chaplin, that was forbidden until now... “The Great Dictator.”

“Oh, yes, those were the days...”

---

Anna Husarska worked as an editor and translator in the office of Solidarity abroad (Paris) and was a journalist at the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. In the U.S. she was staff writer at *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker* magazines reporting from conflict and post-conflict situations, Senior Political Analyst at the International Crisis Group and is currently Senior Policy Adviser at the International Rescue Committee. The opinions expressed here are her own.



# BERLIN DIVIDED... AND REUNITED, 1961-1989

## *(A Chronology)*

---

### 1961

MARCH 13 — President John F. Kennedy reaffirmed the determination of the United States to protect the freedom of Berlin.

JUNE 3-4 — President Kennedy and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev met in Vienna, where grave differences on the question of Germany and Berlin became apparent.

JULY/AUGUST — The number of refugees from East Berlin and the GDR rapidly increased. Some 2,000 people per day came over to West Berlin between August 1 and 12. East Germany announced the preparation of “measures to safeguard the security of the German Democratic Republic.”

AUGUST 13 — In the early hours of this Sunday morning, units of the People’s Police and the National People’s Army of the GDR began blocking off the Eastern sector from the three Western sectors. Two days later the construction of a concrete wall began. The border guards received orders to shoot. Deaths occurred among refugees attempting escape.

AUGUST 23 — Only seven crossing points remained allowing access between East and West Berlin. The GDR government declared that only West Berliners holding a special permit would be allowed access to the East. As issuing procedures failed, it was impossible for West Berliners to visit the East.



Above: Before the Wall: a 1952 Berlin border crossing. Opposite Page: in August, 1961, two young girls speak with their grandparents in East Germany... over a barbed wire fence. So close yet so far.









Clockwise from top: After learning that the GDR was sealing off Berlin with barbed road blocks and walls, these East German citizens flee while they can with only a few belongings; West Berliners watch as Eastern workers divide their city in August, 1961; A West Berlin guard stands watch as East German workers add blocks to the wall.





Left: GDR border guards check cars at the Helmstedt Checkpoint in Berlin in December, 1961. Below: President John F. Kennedy greets Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev as they meet for the first time in Vienna on June 3, 1961, two months before the erection of the Berlin Wall.

## 1962

**JANUARY 24** — Twenty-eight men, women, and children managed to escape to West Berlin through a tunnel built under the Wall.

**JUNE 8** — Fourteen East Berliners seized a passenger ferry and escaped across the River Spree under a hail of bullets from GDR border guards. They reached the West Berlin bank unharmed.

**AUGUST 17** — Eighteen-year-old Peter Fechter was caught by bullets during an escape attempt. Seriously wounded, he was left lying near the Wall on East Berlin territory, where he bled to death.

## 1963

**JUNE 26** — President Kennedy visited Berlin and expressed his solidarity with the West Berliners in a now iconic speech. He concluded with the words: "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words: *Ich bin ein Berliner*."



**DECEMBER 17** — An agreement on the issue of border-crossing permits, effective from December 19 until January 5, enabled West Berliners to visit relatives in the Eastern part of the city for the first time since the border was closed.





Left: An East German police officer crawls through a tunnel built in West Berlin — the GDR claimed it was built for Western spies, while the West claimed it was built to help refugees. Above: Two men open an oil drum that had been used to smuggle their girlfriends over to West Berlin in 1965.



Left: West German construction workers stop for a chat directly next to the Berlin Wall in September, 1967. Above: British soldiers watch the border in November, 1968. On the other side, East Germans are extending the Berlin Wall.





Clockwise from top left: West Berliners queue up for pass certificates to visit relatives in the East. East Berliners did not have this option; Families return to the West after visiting relatives in the East Berlin. The sign reads "See you again in the capital of the GDR!"; An aerial view of the Berlin Wall from the East; An East German border guard watches the fortified border. East German guards were ordered to shoot on sight anyone who attempted to escape.



## 1964

OCTOBER 5 — In the greatest tunnel escape since the Wall was erected, fifty-seven East Berliners successfully reached the Western part of the city.

## 1970

MARCH 19 — West Germany's chancellor, Willy Brandt, and the chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers, Willi Stoph, met in Erfurt, East Germany.

MARCH 26 — The US, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union started negotiations on a Berlin Agreement.

## 1971

JANUARY 31 — Re-establishment of telephone communications, which had been cut since 1952.

MAY 3 — Walter Ulbricht resigned from office as general secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity party, to be replaced by Erich Honecker.

SEPTEMBER 3 — The ambassadors to the Federal Republic of Germany representing the U.S., Great Britain, and France and the Soviet ambassador to the GDR signed the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin. The agreement regulated free access to West Berlin and guaranteed the maintenance and development of ties between West Berlin and the Federal Republic.

## 1972

DECEMBER 21 — West German minister Egon Bahr and GDR State Secretary Michael Kohl met in East Berlin to sign the Basic Agreement on Relationships between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic.

## 1975

OCTOBER 29 — Agreement between the GDR and the West Berlin Senate on mutual assistance in the case of accidents on border waterways.

President Ronald Reagan waves to the crowd after a famous June, 1987 speech in which he declared "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" He is applauded on the right by FRG Chancellor Helmut Kohl and on the left by FRG President Philipp Jenninger.





**1980**

OCTOBER 9 — The GDR authorities raised the compulsory payment for visitors from West Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany to twenty-five deutsche marks per day.

**1982**

JUNE 11 — President Ronald Reagan visited West Berlin during a tour of Europe. In a speech outlining the so-called Berlin Initiative he summoned the Soviet Union to take cooperative steps toward the securing of peace.

**1984**

JANUARY 20 — Six GDR citizens applied for political asylum at the US Embassy in East Berlin. They were allowed to cross to West Berlin two days later.

JANUARY 24 — Twelve GDR citizens sought refuge at the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic in East Berlin. They, too, were granted exit to West Berlin.



As tourists look on, East Germans are held at rifle point after a failed attempt to escape to the West.

MARCH 14 — GDR border guards erected a second wall between the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz. Since its construction in August 1961, the Wall had already claimed seventy-three lives.

**1985**

MARCH 11 — Mikhail Gorbachev elected as the new secretary general of the Communist party in the Soviet Union.

**1987**

JUNE 7-8 — A rock concert was held in front of the Reichstag in West Berlin and many teenagers also congregated on the Eastern side of the Wall in order to listen. There was conflict on the Eastern side with the People's Police and members of the State Security Service. About a thousand teenagers chanted, "The Wall must go!"

JUNE 12 — During Berlin's 750th anniversary celebrations, President Reagan visited the city. In a speech in front of the Brandenburg Gate he said, "The Wall cannot withstand freedom."

DECEMBER 10 — GDR security forces prevented a demonstration in East Berlin organized by the domestic "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights."

**1988**

JANUARY — In East Berlin numerous members of peace and human rights' groups were arrested. There and in many other towns of East Germany people congregated in prayers of appeal each evening.

**1989**

JANUARY 18 — Honecker declared that the Wall would "remain for fifty, even a hundred years, as long as the reasons for its building remain."





Clockwise from top: 120,000 East Germans demonstrate in Leipzig in October, 1989; A lone East German soldier shakes his fist at a mass of West German protesters who had thrown bottles at guards and a newly-erected barrier at Checkpoint Charlie on October 7, 1989; Hundreds of East German citizens race through the woods into Hungary on their way to the open border with Austria and the West in August, 1989.



FEBRUARY 6 — A young man was shot dead at the Wall by border guards while trying to escape. He was the last in a total of seventy-nine victims to die there before the borders were finally opened nine months later.

MARCH 8 — A thirty-two-year-old GDR citizen crashed to his death in the West Berlin district of Zehlendorf in an attempt to escape in a self-made hot-air balloon.

MAY 7 — Local elections in East Germany resulted in protests and allegations of fraud.

JUNE 7 — In East Berlin, after a protest demonstration against fraudulent activity during the local elections, some 120 citizens were temporarily held in custody.

AUGUST 8 — By now 131 GDR citizens had sought refuge and refused to leave the Permanent

Representation of the Federal Republic in East Berlin. The building had to be closed because of overcrowding.

AUGUST 19 — During a cultural event on the Hungarian-Austrian border, approximately 900 East Germans escaped to West Germany via Austria. Since August 1, more than 3,000 GDR citizens had escaped via Hungary. In the following weeks the number of people taking this escape route increased.

SEPTEMBER 11 — Hungary opened its border with Austria. By the end of the month about 10,000 GDR citizens had crossed through Austria into West Germany. Founding of the “New Forum” in East Berlin by critics of the GDR regime.

Berliners sing and dance atop the Berlin Wall on the morning of November 10, 1989 — the day after the wall fell.







OCTOBER 7 — In East Berlin, official ceremonies celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the GDR. Thousands demonstrated there and in other East German cities for democracy and freedom of opinion. Soviet state and party chief Mikhail Gorbachev openly exhorted the GDR leadership to enter into the reform process and warned, “Life punishes those who come too late.”

OCTOBER 9 — Mass demonstration in Leipzig, with 70,000 participants. Among the slogans: “We Are the People!”

OCTOBER 18 — After eighteen years in power as state and party chief, Erich Honecker was forced out of office. The Socialist Unity party Central Committee elected Egon Krenz as successor. Krenz announced imminent reforms.



Left: November 9, 1989, the night the wall came down. Berliners crowded atop the Berlin Wall and demanded its destruction. Above: A traffic jam along 17th Street on November 11, 1989, leading through the Brandenburg Gate and into the West. Thousands of GDR citizens fled west after the wall came down.

OCTOBER 21-30 — Hundreds of thousands participated in demonstrations that swept East Berlin and other major towns and cities in East Germany.

NOVEMBER 4 — A protest rally against the Socialist Unity party regime was staged at Alexanderplatz in East Berlin. Over this particular weekend, some 15,000 GDR citizens arrived in West Germany via Czechoslovakia.

NOVEMBER 7 — Resignation of the GDR government, followed next day by the resignation of the entire Politburo. Increasing demonstrations and floods of refugees.





NOVEMBER 9 — In the evening, the GDR government unexpectedly opened the borders to the Federal Republic and West Berlin. Throughout the night tens of thousands streamed through the Wall into West Berlin.

NOVEMBER 10 — Dismantling of the Wall commenced by GDR border guards to create new crossing points. East and West Berliners joined in the dismantling process.

NOVEMBER 11-12 — During this weekend three million GDR citizens visited West Germany to take a look, go shopping, and visit friends and relatives. Tens of thousands came to West Berlin, filling the Kurfilrstandamm and inner city.

NOVEMBER 13 — The People's Parliament of the GDR elected Hans Modrow, former Socialist Unity party leader in Dresden, new prime minister. In Leipzig more than 200,000 people demonstrated again for political reforms. The "Monday demonstrations" continued in Leipzig and other East German cities during the following weeks.



Left: East and West Berliners stand together in the rain on December 22, 1989, to see the opening of the Brandenburg Gate Park after 28 years. Above: East German border guards greet the West German police as the GDR removes pieces of the wall to create a public thoroughway.

DECEMBER 3 — Resignation of the entire Socialist Unity party leadership under Egon Krenz. Former state and party chief Erich Honecker was expelled from the party along with a series of other leading communist functionaries.

DECEMBER 22 — The Brandenburg Gate, for twenty-eight years a symbol of German division, was reopened to pedestrians.

DECEMBER 31 — Some 500,000 people, including visitors from all over the world, joined in New Year's celebrations at the Brandenburg Gate.



## ROUNDTABLE

*We asked a number of thinkers to share their responses to a single question:  
"What was the significance of November 9, 1989?"*









# Theresa Bond

Theresa Bond is a pseudonym for a respected political analyst specializing in closed societies.

**N**ovember 9, 1989. The iconic photo captures the crowded crest of the Berlin Wall as people celebrate its crumbling. It is a globally recognized symbol of the end of a world divided by oppressive communist regimes.

Or is it?

Twenty years after the event, not one single photograph of this event was legally viewed by any of the 23 million citizens of North Korea. This is ironic because the closest thing to the Berlin Wall's Checkpoint Charlie is the Panmunjom border post between North and South Korea. There, soldiers of the last nation divided by communism look menacingly into each other's eyes. Hardly anyone, including the North Korean regime, favors a wall between the two Koreas, but the North's dynastic and paranoid dictators are particularly difficult to handle.

Cuba's regime is another that clings to communism and oppresses its people in the name of that ideology. The Wall in Cuba is personified by a wall of Malecón, the seaside boulevard in Havana where Cubans come to look at the sea and the world beyond their island, a free world to which they cannot freely travel. Not one picture of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, has ever been legally published in Cuba.

These two are extreme cases of totalitarian communist dictatorships. Remnants of the Wall linger on in several parts of the former Soviet Union — Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan among the most prominent examples — but few people in Minsk, Ashgabat, or Tashkent ignore the wrong that victimizes them. They have dissident opinions — they just cannot voice them.

When asked about “dissident opinions,” people in Havana may not know what the word “dissident” means. But in Pyongyang they will know neither the word “dissident” nor “opinion.”



Cold War tensions linger on the Korean peninsula. Here, South Korean soldiers closely watch North Korean soldiers in the border village of Tention.





Clockwise from top: Cuban dissidents demand freedom and democracy, 2003; Female members of Turkmenistan's People's Council; An Uzbek woman examines foreign newspapers and magazines.



# Janusz Bugajski

Janusz Bugajski is the Director of the New European Democracies project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. He was a Senior Analyst at Radio Free Europe in Munich shortly before the collapse of communism.

**T**he Iron Curtain disintegrated long before the Berlin Wall was dismantled in November 1989. The communist system in Eastern Europe had been in terminal decay for several years. The single-party regimes stifled human rights and political freedoms and were unable to deliver on the core justification for communism: economic performance. The disparities between East and West grew starker during the 1980s, especially as market integration boosted West European prosperity and the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact proved not to be a credible alternative to an integrated Europe.

Protest movements against communism periodically rumbled across the region, but in the summer of 1980 an earthquake shook Europe with the formation of Poland's free trade union Solidarity. Although Solidarity was temporarily stifled and driven underground, its mass membership and far-sighted leadership demonstrated that the days of Soviet-imposed communism were numbered. The only unknown was whether the system would disappear with a bang or a whimper.







Above: On the eve of the October 1989 GDR elections, East Germans sit in front of the Palace of the Republic in a peaceful demand for democratic reforms.  
Opposite page: Pro-Solidarity banners, September, 1988.

Fortunately, communism no longer had the strength to resist its own expiration. Ideologically bankrupt, economically incompetent, and politically primitive, Marxism-Leninism proved another experimental dead end. Moreover, the Soviet regime that had propped up proxy governments throughout Eastern Europe no longer had the conviction or resources forcibly to suppress the “fraternal” peoples’ yearnings for pluralism and national independence.

By the time the Berlin Wall was formally breached, Poland already had achieved a democratically elected government, while Hungary and Czechoslovakia were steadily moving toward political pluralism as leaders there realized that systemic change was unavoidable.

Looking back on November 1989, it is often overlooked that while these historic events signaled the collapse of communism, they also heralded the national liberation of Central and East European states from

Soviet overlordship. While communism is but a fading nightmare in these nations, their struggle to maintain state independence from an increasingly assertive Russian government continues to this day.

Indeed, officials in Moscow seek to revise the significance of 1989 by asserting that the Soviet Union did not occupy half of Europe after World War II and by underplaying how Soviet arms imposed there a repressive totalitarian system that stifled political and economic progress for almost half a century. Some of Russia’s spokesmen claim that the Kremlin benevolently dismantled the Soviet bloc and that the Cold War ended in a draw, rather than admitting that the Soviet system proved an abject failure and that it disintegrated from within.

Unfortunately, this notion of a benign or even progressive Soviet system is offered to justify current and future assertiveness. For this reason, both Europeans and Americans must vigilantly defend the real historical legacy of November 1989.



## Edwina S. Campbell

Edwina Campbell has served on the United States Air Force Air University faculty since 2003, and before that in a number of academic and analyst positions. She has served as a U.S. diplomat, specializing in political-military affairs, and her publications include *Consultation and Consensus in NATO* and *Germany's Past and Europe's Future*. The views expressed in Campbell's essay are hers alone and not those of Air University, the United States Air Force, or the U.S. Department of Defense.

**O**n November 9, 1989, I was on a speaking tour in West Germany for the United States Information Agency. I spent the day in Saarbruecken, took a train to Frankfurt, read for awhile, went to sleep early, and woke up the next morning without having heard about events in Berlin. No one mentioned them over breakfast. When I finally turned on the television mid-morning, on every channel, reporters stood in front of the Wall while people behind them chipped away at it. I sat down on the bed, dumbfounded, and stared at the TV.

What do you do on a bright, cold day on which the world's strategic tectonic plates are shifting? I visited Frankfurt's Paulskirche, which in 1848 had witnessed the failed attempt to create a unified, democratic Germany. A lot of schoolchildren were touring the church, but no guide explaining the events of 1848 deviated from the script to mention the path to unification being carved in the Berlin Wall at that moment. I heard no conversation about the opening of the Wall until that evening, at the political science conference I was attending at the university.

I've been grateful ever since that I never did get to Berlin on that trip; the atmosphere there was unique. Throughout West Germany in the coming days, I had the same experience that I'd had in Frankfurt. I encountered a huge divide between academics, politicians, and diplomats, on the one hand, and most West Germans, on the other, in the interest they showed in the opening of the Wall. When I did engage people in conversation, some were nervous or even fearful about unfolding events, but many professed to be simply indifferent.

My experience that long-ago November says something important about the rocky course of German-American relations since the mid-1990s. Perhaps the greatest difference between the two countries, culturally and politically, is their attitude toward change. The opening of the Wall ushered in a period of global political change unprecedented, at least, since 1918, and perhaps simply unprecedented. The transatlantic paradigms of the 20th century became inadequate, but an understandable desire to cling to them persisted in Germany.

West German foreign policy was built on two virtues: stability and predictability. In 1989 these were the pillars, of Bonn's Ostpolitik, pursued since the 1970s





A new era. Above: German Chancellor Angela Merkel and U.S. President Barack Obama, April 2009. Left: Once rivals, now allies. German and Polish soldiers serve together in the NATO alliance.

and of its even more longstanding ties to the NATO alliance. On November 9, 1989, that era of stability and predictability ended, and the West Germans I encountered that month instinctively seemed to know it and to shy away from the reality of what was happening in Berlin.

Americans have a different history. We tend to view moments of political unpredictability and instability as opportunities to seize, not crises to be feared. This can

make us overly optimistic about our ability to deal with change, and the transatlantic crises of the last few years reflect that, as well. The American belief that a problem can be solved inevitably clashes with the German conviction that situations must be managed.

Both are right. On November 9, 1989, the four-decades old Cold War was solved because the Allies had collectively managed their often tense relationship with the Soviet Union. The answer to “the German question” similarly emerged from a decades-long transatlantic strategic dialogue. Both countries need to remember that answers to today’s global political questions can only emerge from a willingness to continue that dialogue in the century ahead.



## Roy Ginsberg

Roy H. Ginsberg is Professor of Government at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, and author of *Demystifying the European Union: The Enduring Logic of Regional Integration*.

**T**wenty years after its fall, the Berlin Wall still evokes a variety of painful images. Berliners and the world remember those killed trying to escape and families and friends kept apart after 1961 when the communists erected the Wall to preserve their failing system. After all, no one ever tried to escape from freedom in West Berlin to tyranny in East Berlin.

The Wall was another manifestation of the wartime Allies' failure to agree on what to do with a defeated Germany. Twice brutalized by German armed forces in the 20th century, the Soviets wanted a neutral, weakened, and dependent neighbor. Conversely, the Americans and their allies wanted a democratic and free Germany as a bulwark against the spread of communism and to prevent the return of fascism.

Since the wartime Allies retained occupation rights in Berlin after 1949, both the western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the Soviet satellite German Democratic Republic remained independent but not fully sovereign. Not until 1989-1990 when the Wall came down, the wartime Allies relinquished their residual occupation rights, and the two German states were united, was World War II finally concluded.

The Wall represented an artificially divided Germany and a dangerously bifurcated world. It was in that world that I visited East Berlin as a student in 1974. What I most remember as a citizen of a free country was the sense of foreboding I felt when entering and the sense of freedom I felt when leaving — and the sadness of knowing that others left behind could not follow.

Fifteen years later, I rushed into my classroom to share my joy at the news that the Wall was being torn down. My students were intrigued but not exhilarated. Their experience differed from that of my generation. Children and grandchildren of those who fought to defeat fascism, my generation was more directly connected to these wartime heroes and to the postwar leadership of the United States and its allies. From the Marshall Plan, Truman Doctrine, and Berlin Airlift of the late 1940s to the containment of communism in the 1950s and 1960s, the West stood down communism. Diplomat and Russia scholar George F. Kennan predicted communism would atrophy from within, which it did, while containment limited Soviet expansionism to Eastern Europe.

Postwar West Germans must be congratulated for constructing a democratic polity and a beacon of hope for the East. West Germany had two advantages over the Weimar Republic, its doomed democratic





Above: German paratroopers prepare for a 2001 peacekeeping mission in Macedonia.



Left: A German Court clears the way for ratification of a European Union reform treaty.

predecessor. It had the economic security to prosper and democratize as part of what became the European Union (EU). It had physical security through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); thus the FRG would no longer threaten or be threatened by other European powers.

Today's united Germany, a recipient of security from the EU and NATO, promotes democracy and

stability in a world far more dangerous to many civilian populations than the world of 1989. If Germany can assume leadership through the EU, NATO, and the United Nations to further enhance stability and security in a world in need of both, it can give back to those who helped it to be secure and free.



## Ronald H. Linden

**RONALD H. LINDEN** is Professor of Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh. A Princeton Ph.D. (1976), he was Director of the Center for Russian and East European Studies at Pitt from 1984-89 and 1991-98. From 1989 to 1991 Dr. Linden served as Director of Research for Radio Free Europe in Munich, Germany. He is the author of numerous works on Central and Southeast Europe and is the Associate Editor of *Problems of Post-Communism*.

**N**ineteen eighty-nine began with Europe divided, as it had been since the end of World War II. More than one hundred million people lived in states dominated by the Soviet Union and national communist parties of Eastern Europe. Václav Havel, a renowned playwright and proponent of human rights, languished in jail in Czechoslovakia; Nicolae Ceaușescu and Todor Zhivkov were in their third and fourth decades of tyrannical rule in Romania and Bulgaria, respectively. And in Germany, a 12-foot-high wall cutting through and around the city of Berlin symbolized most poignantly the real and symbolic division of the continent.

By the end of the year, Václav Havel was president of Czechoslovakia, dictatorships from the Balkans to the Baltic Sea were overturned, and the people of Eastern Europe, having regained their sovereignty, began the task of building democracies and free economies. The opening of the Berlin Wall on the night of November 9, 1989, was emblematic of the end of the separation of Europe.

Apart from the breathtaking speed and scope of these events, several features make them remarkable. First, while analysts and political actors had noted

the deficiencies of communist regimes, their nearly simultaneous fall in Eastern Europe was unexpected. Previous challenges usually had been confined to a single country. This time the demonstrations and societal demands were infectious — and the results sped from the replacement of the communist prime



Mikhail Gorbachev discusses agricultural management reforms with Soviet farm equipment workers.





minister in Poland at the end of August to the execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania on Christmas Day.

In addition, with the exception of Romania, the revolutionary changes were nonviolent. The regimes were challenged not by foreign armies but by their own peoples, convinced that the governing doctrines of the past 40 years had brought not liberation but repression. But the upheaval went beyond mere dissatisfaction with failed policies. These events also demonstrated the importance of governing legitimacy, the idea that governments have the right — not just the power — to rule. From the beginning, East Europeans viewed local communist rulers not as “theirs” but rather as the product of Soviet domination. When Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader who had been pushing reform in his own country, removed the threat of intervention, the derivative regimes of Eastern Europe were swept away.

Two other factors made possible the end of communism and the fall of the Berlin Wall. One was the spread of information, both about the West and about the real situation in Eastern Europe. Knowledge about the how West Europeans and Americans were governed, and how they lived, enhanced the appeal of alternative models. While notions of democracy and freedom in Eastern Europe may not have been fully specified, the knowledge that these concepts worked elsewhere proved a powerful motive.



Clockwise from top left: Former dissident Václav Havel greets crowd on December 29, 1989, his first day as President of Czechoslovakia; Over 100,000 answered the call when the dissident group Civic Forum called for a demonstration against Czechoslovakia's communist rulers; A Bulgarian man reads about election returns, June 2001.

None of this would have mattered had the people of the region not shown the courage and vision to seize the moment, to recognize that their time had come to undertake the tasks of both tearing down — as they did the Berlin Wall in 1989 — and building up — as they do now every day in newly democratic societies.



# Andreas Rude

**Andreas Rude** is a Public Affairs Specialist at the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen with special focus on security policy. He is also a freelance writer and columnist whose work has appeared in most major Danish newspapers.

“Let’s go find a pocket calculator!”

In the summer of 1989, a few months before the Berlin Wall came down, I worked at a small think tank in Copenhagen devoted to security policy. Every day the staff would convene for an informal luncheon discussion of current affairs, and in August of that year something astonishing was happening. The East German government was allowing its citizens to cross the border from the German Democratic Republic into Czechoslovakia and Hungary en route to Austria, and we all watched as the crowds leaving grew bigger every day. The situation was fluid to say the least, and one particularly excited colleague wanted to estimate the point at which a much-feared neighbor would be completely empty of its 16 million inhabitants. Hence the urgent request for a calculator.

The flippancy showed the mood. It was unbelievable — a fairy tale in the cynical world of international politics. When the Wall fell in November, the excitement swept everywhere, and as one peaceful revolution after another caught on in Eastern and Central Europe, somber predictions of anarchy and violent reprisals gave way to real optimism. The catalysts seemed all of a distinct moral nature: human rights,

concern for the environment, and authoritarian regimes collapsing under the weight of their own lies and worthless slogans. History was being put right.

Perhaps the greatest consequence of the fall of that strange monument was the birth of a different mindset. No longer suspended by the logic of superpower confrontation, the main currents of European culture and politics were set free, and Europeans began to think about themselves in ways they had not for half a century. The dark side of that feat was the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the specter of “ethnic cleansing.” The reunification of Germany, on the other hand, was a logical follow-up to the fall of the Wall, and Berlin has since regained its former standing as a celebrated center for politics, media, and the arts. Significantly, it has also preserved and added to its richness its American post-World War II legacy. For Berlin was an American success story before it became a European one.

The Cold War ended when the Wall was knocked over and long lines of modest Trabant cars made their way from East to West. Tremendous energies soaked up by that conflict were released, with Europe becoming more prosperous and bolder, as the European Union expanded across the continent and NATO welcomed former adversaries as new members. Think tanks too have grown, as challenges nobody thought





Clockwise from top left: NATO alliance soldiers display their nations' colors; an East European crowd masses to rally for freedom; former adversaries — a former U.S. army lieutenant at left and a former East German state security officer at right — read about the once-divided city.

of a few decades ago now bear down on us. In all this, the conversation about Europe reopened in 1989 is a true asset, critical on both sides of the Atlantic and producing impressive results. But even as this conversation deepens, it is nowhere near any conclusion.

Nobody should be surprised about that. The rules of the game changed as if by magic in 1989. Twenty years later we are still catching up, making history as we go along.



## Simon Serfaty

Simon Serfaty holds the Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geopolitics at the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC. His most recent book is *Architects of Delusion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

**W**hat happened in Berlin 20 years ago, on November 9, 1989 — and what followed in Moscow the following year — was magical. The moment is not so far away that it cannot be celebrated now with the same emotion as it was lived then. So many had lived for so long with the “long, twilight struggle” we call the Cold War that they viewed its ending as a miracle rather than the fulfillment of a man-made vision that had dared anticipate the roll back of an evil empire, the collapse of a fatally flawed ideology, and the peaceful resurrection of Europe from two suicidal wars.

A vision, however, is mostly what is remembered after everything has worked. Lost sometimes in the glow of success are the components of that vision: the patience in the midst of occasional setbacks, prudence in the face of dangerous provocations, and fortitude to overcome the tragic burdens of history that produced the events of fall 1989. The many expressions of that vision, lived over time, deserve to be remembered, not only because they worked but also for their relevance to the new insecurity unleashed most dramatically on September 11, 2001.







Above: Political activists demanding greater transparency in government release balloons outside the Reichstag, 2004. Right: a NATO summit welcomes new members Albania and Croatia and celebrates the alliance's 60th anniversary. Opposite page: a tourist reviews one of the last remaining pieces of the Berlin Wall.



Central to the vision that shaped the Cold War and its final outcome was a broad U.S. understanding that despite the nation's unquestioned might, the “over there” of yesteryear had come over here to endanger American interests and values — and could again. Admittedly, calls to disengage from various Cold War flashpoints, to “come home,” were heard throughout the Cold War, often linked to warnings of irreversible decline and impending disasters. But those calls could be ignored, and the heavy burdens of entangling commitments could be borne because Americans had arrived at a broad understanding that no nation alone, however peerless, could remain isolated for long — without allies that shared its values, interests, and goals and could thus contribute their capabilities, experience, and diversity to common, complementary, or compatible policies.

The ultimate goal of U.S. leadership, however, was not merely to win a war but to defeat war itself on a European continent that had made of war an

unsustainable way of life. As a result, the events of November 1989 were not merely the triumph of the U.S.-led transatlantic West over the Soviet Union but Europe's triumph over history: As the states of Europe bid farewell to arms when they surprisingly agreed to a gradual pooling of their national sovereignty, they recast themselves into an ever-closer community, now a union, that gave them more democracy, affluence, stability, and peace than ever before.

There were those, 20 years ago, who thought that the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany would threaten Europe's unity, as well as its solidarity with the United States. That the reverse instead proved true testifies to the depth of the vision that brought America and Europe to that magical moment 20 years ago and has motivated the enlargement and deepening of the Euro-Atlantic institutions that continue to define their relations. Admittedly, during the Cold War this vision was confined to “half the world” only, as Secretary of State Dean Acheson subsequently wrote. Today those limits remind us of the need to extend that vision, to afford others the opportunity to achieve peace, prosperity, and freedom.



# Manfred Stinnes

Manfred Stinnes, Ph.D. (University of Minnesota, 1978), has been a Lecturer in International Relations at Humboldt University in Berlin since 2003.

**W**e may all agree on the geostrategic consequences that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall: The Soviet empire began to disappear and with it the satellite countries — East Germany among them — emerged from Soviet domination. The opening of the borders between East and West Berlin marked an initially hesitant beginning to a process that culminated in the October 3, 1990, act of German unification — or, in correct historical and constitutional terms, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) dissolved itself and joined the Federal Republic of Germany. This was achieved without violence and should be interpreted as a diplomatic triumph of the Western alliance statecraft, not least for securing Moscow's final approval for this fundamental reordering of the post-World War II political status quo.

The consequences for the continent were profound. Throughout the 19th and early-20th centuries, Germany faced real strategic rivals and adopted its famous "Schaukelpolitik" policy of fatally adjusting its orientation between East and West. With the peaceful reunification of the two postwar German states, this dilemma has been put to rest. For the first time, Germany is surrounded by friendly countries. Since 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany was a Western

country and it has remained so even after the events of 1989-1990.

Germany's new, secure Western orientation offers special reassurance to its European neighbors. It is grounded firmly in the special German-American relationship, a bond probably best explained by the anecdote in which of the German Foreign Office telephone operator, before connecting Foreign Minister



East German refugees stand outside the "head office of provisional accommodation" after escaping through Hungary and Austria into West Germany on August 8, 1989.





Even a month before the Wall fell, political repression remained in place in East Germany. Top: East German police repel pro-democracy demonstrators. Left: young East Germans light candles as a protest against political arrests.

H.D. Genscher with Secretary of State James Baker in February 1990, told Baker: "God bless America." The German-American relationship was never as intimate as in 1989-1990. That was a time of great optimism. Experts and laymen talked about a "peace dividend" and expected democratic progress on a global scale.

While events in Berlin were of huge symbolic and practical importance, the Polish and Hungarian opposition movements had paved the way for the German events. On June 4, 1989, the Polish opposition achieved the first (almost-free) elections in a communist

country, and in May 1989 the Hungarian reform-communist government opened the border to Austria — months before the Berlin Wall was breached.

But the East Germans also acted bravely. Segments of East German Protestant churches functioned as a haven for protesters and opposition-minded citizens who saw no future in the GDR. The southern parts of East Germany proved an opposition stronghold, with Leipzig its informal capital.

As the tension between the GDR government and the opposition movement grew, the famous Monday night demonstrations in Leipzig became the focal point. Following the October 4, 1989, GDR 40th anniversary celebrations, the East Berlin government prepared for a final crackdown and, as many feared, was even ready for a "Chinese" solution to suppress the next Monday demonstration on October 9. Army brigades





and large special police forces were mobilized and they surrounded the historic inner city. Hospital floors were emptied and prepared for emergency treatment of large numbers of wounded. Demonstrators prepared their wills and many expected not to survive the Monday night demonstrations. A heroic atmosphere pervaded the city. However, when 70,000 demonstrators gathered peacefully to march down the streets, military and police officials did not dare to order the troops to shoot. It was the beginning of the end of the communist government in East Germany. For the first time in German history, a successful, nonviolent revolution occurred. By comparison, the fall of the Wall merely punctuated the victory of the democratic revolution.

Twenty years later, many former East Germans have lost their pride in the achievements of 1989-1990. Some even have dropped the term "nonviolent revolution" in favor of the bureaucratic word "turn"

After German reunification, graffiti artists appropriated the remains of the Wall.

(Wende). A domestic East-West uneasiness has set in, mostly due to economic difficulties. While Berlin celebrates the November 9 anniversary of the fall of the Wall, the Leipzig region instead commemorates the nonviolent revolution and the momentous night of October 9. After 20 years, these divided memories call for honest appraisals and common understandings. While this comparatively modest divide is real, it pales in comparison with the enormous political achievements of the German people and their neighbors, events perhaps best symbolized by the passing of the Berlin Wall and the uniting of a free German people.



## Jeremi Suri

**Jeremi Suri** is the E. Gordon Fox Professor of History, the Director of the European Union Center of Excellence, and the Director of the Grand Strategy Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of three major books, most recently, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*. Professor Suri frequently writes for scholarly journals, newspapers, magazines, and various web blogs, including his own: <http://jeremisuri.net>.

**T**he fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of an era — a 50-year period of continuous superpower confrontation, rigid global alliances, threatening nuclear arms races, and the brutal repression of dissenting ideologies. The Cold War was a time when the dominant international states grew more powerful and exerted leverage over distant societies on an unprecedented scale. The break-up of traditional colonial empires in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East only increased the influence of the U.S., Soviet, and Chinese governments in those regions. The strongest states dominated the global landscape from the last dying days of the Second World War through the heady hours of November 9, 1989, when the world opened to a new kind of popular politics.

Communist power crumbled in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union because citizens no longer believed in their leaders' professed ideals. Citizens also ceased to fear the consequences of repression by government forces that were visibly uncertain about what they believed and what kinds of violence they could legitimately deploy. Communists ruled until 1989 in Eastern Europe and 1991 in the Soviet Union, but they lost real political authority years earlier.

The fall of the Berlin Wall testified to the shift in political momentum from communist rulers to educated, articulate, and newly empowered citizens. Václav Havel, Lech Walesa, and Boris Yeltsin emerged



A woman laborer repairs a wall as portraits of Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev and East German political figures look on.





Above: supporters of Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first post-communist leader. Right: Angela Merkel becomes the first Chancellor from the former East Germany, the first woman, and the youngest person to hold that office.



as public heroes. These figures attracted support from people who craved authentic leaders, climbing to power through independence, rather than careerism. They also commanded a broad international following through the global circulation of their words and images. The Cold War began in an era of intimidating radio speeches from aging men; it ended with the youthful energy of attractive figures on television.

The new politics of television, and soon the Internet, were fragmented and impatient. Groups of people organized across societies — former political prisoners, religious dissidents, and labor unionists, among others — to challenge the grand narratives of authoritarian communist and liberal capitalist societies. They demanded that the state serve their specific interests. Groups of consumers, investors, and students, in particular, also rejected collective sacrifices and opted for instant gratification. They demanded political presentism rather than calls for a future utopia. The political was now the personal.

In this context, the fall of the Berlin Wall unleashed a proliferation of dreams for better living conditions, but these remained small dreams. They promised freedom from lies and repression. They did not, however, offer a clear path to a new world. Talk of an “end to history” masked an inability to think about what might come next. The liberation that accompanied the end of the Cold War often produced a dangerous intoxication. Forward thinking grew more difficult with each passing day.

November 9, 1989, opened new opportunities for personal freedom and organization. It also created new challenges for managing international relations. Making the freedoms that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall serve the needs of a more complex world — that is the political calling of the first global post-Cold War generation.



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Bureau of International Information Programs  
2009  
<http://www.america.gov>

**Photo credits:**

All pictures are credited AP Images with the following exceptions:

Inside front cover: lower right, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Page 5: © Microsoft Corporation. All rights Reserved. 6: left to right, (c) Bettmann/CORBIS; Carl Mydans/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

7: left, dpa/Landov. 15: bottom left, © Bettmann/CORBIS. 24: top to bottom, Erazm Ciolek/Reuters; Chris Niedenthal/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

28: left, dpa/Landov. 32: Günter Bratke/dpa/Landov. 33: Keystone/Getty Images.

34: top, dpa/Landov. 35: top, Volkmar K. Wentzel/National Geographic/Getty Images.

36: top right, Express Newspapers/Getty Images; bottom left, Terry Fincher/Express Newspapers/Getty Images. 37: top left, dpa/Landov.

63: Popperfoto/Getty Images. 64: right, John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images.

---

Executive Editor: George Clack  
Managing Editor: Michael Jay Friedman  
Design Director: Min-Chih Yao  
Contributing Editors: Jody Rose Platt,  
Anthony Crews  
Photo Research: Maggie Johnson Sliker



*"It was a great holiday: In the perennial struggle between man and barbed wire, today man triumphed and the barbed wire was defeated."*

— Adam Michnik



Bureau of International Information Programs  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
<http://www.america.gov>